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The Two-Headed Beast: Notes toward the Definition of Allegory

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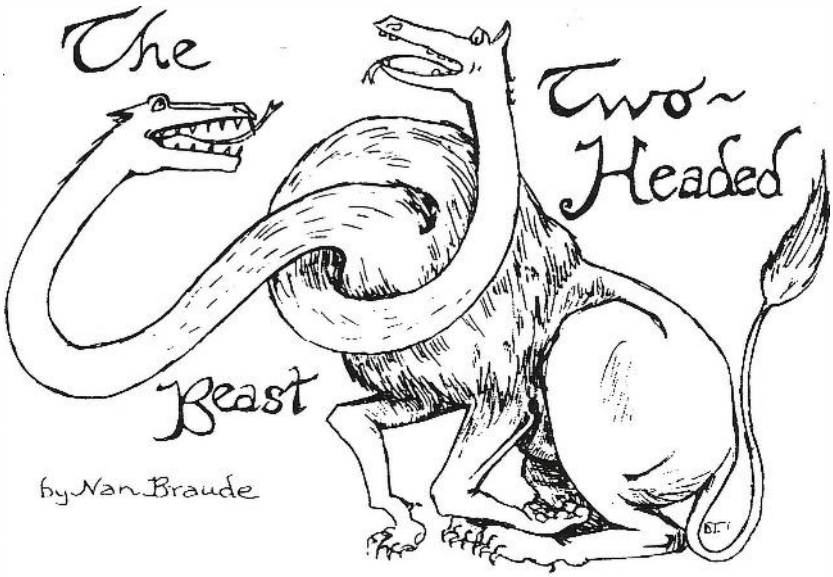
Abstract

The author provides a literary history of the concept of allegory going back to Homer, describing "allegorism" and "typology" as the two divisions of allegory, distinguishing allegory from symbolism and conceit, exploring modern attitudes toward allegory, and briefly examining the use of allegory and symbol in Tolkien, Lewis, and Williams.

Keywords

Allegory; Lewis, C.S.—Use of allegory; Symbolism; Tolkien, J.R.R.—Use of symbolism; Williams, Charles—Use of allegory



THE TWO-HEADED BEAST: NOTES TOWARD THE DEFINITION OF ALLEGORY

Allegory is a term that crops up from time to time in literary discussions, especially those in Mythlore. But its use is surrounded by confusion as to its meaning. In his article in the second issue of Mythlore, Colin Duriez quotes in the course of one paragraph (on page 25) C.S. Lewis' statement that "allegory is a mode of expression" and W.H. Auden's complaint that "analysis always tends to reduce symbolism to a false and boring allegory;" the latter which clearly implies a concept of allegory as a mode of interpretation, not of expression. The same confusion is found in definitions of the term in glossaries and dictionaries: Beckson and Ganz, in line with Lewis, define it as "an extended narrative which carries a second meaning along with its surface story."[1] M.H. Abrams has a defintion that seems to try to include both meainings:

> An allegory undertakes to make a doctrine or thesis interesting and persuasive by converting it into a narrative in which the agents, and sometimes the setting as well, represents general concepts, moral qualities, or other abstractions.[2]

At first blush this sounds like Lewis, but his omission of validity as well as interest and persuasion as characteristic of allegory implies a certain doubts to whether it is trying to express anything in a true and necessary manner. The confusion is worse compounded by the Oxford Universal Dictionary (the abridged OED), which defines "allegory" as "description of a subject under the guise of some other subject of aptly suggestive resemblance" or "an extended metaphor," but defines the verb "allegorize" as "to make or treat as allegorical"; "to expound allegorically; to construct or utter allegories" (italics mine), thus taking in the interpretative as well as the expressive sense. The literal meaning given for allegoria is simply "speaking otherwise that one seems to speak," which is capable of almost infinite extention.

In actual use, "allegory" does have a double meaning. The two senses of the word are equally ancient, going back to Hellenistic times, but are quite different in meaning. In essence, to read allegorically (henceforth referred to as allegorism) means to seek something in a text beyond the literal meaning, and in fact, as the process developed, to discard the literal meaning. To write allegorically (hereafter called allegory) means essentially to write figuratively: to choose a literal meaning that can carry further significance without being distorted on the literal level; the process embraces everything from simple metaphor and simile ("A garden enclosed is my sister, my spouse; a spring shut up, a fountain sealed"; "O my luve is like a red, red rose") to complex extended narratives like The Pilgrim's Progress and The Faerie Queene.

Allegorism and Typology

Allegorism, the interpretative mode, is pre-Christian in origin. The nature and motives of allegorism are concisely summarized by K.J. Woollcombe, in Essays on Typology:[3]

> The Iliad and the Odyssey were at a very early date adopted as the basic text-books in Greek education; not even the vigorous protests of Plato could oust them from the established position which they occupied in the schools by the fourth century B.C. Moreover, because the sagas were believed to contain eternal truths, they were accorded far greater reverence than mere literary admiration. They owed their place of honor not to their literary beauty, but to the high ideals of chivalry and ethics which they enshrined. The attitude of the Greeks to to the Iliad and the Odyssey thus resembles the Jewish attitude to the Pentateuch.... From the sixth century B.C. onwards, this popular, quàsi-religious admiration of Homer raised certain problems with which the philosophers were obliged to grapple. They had, for instance, to inquire whether a collection of writings which contained a high proportion of humble folk-lore merited such reverence. They had also to show that it was morally justifiable to admire deities, who not infrequently were recorded as having committed acts of gross immorality.
>
> Discussion of these problems is almost as old as Greek prose: from the earliest days philosophers sought to attach a more profound significance to the Homeric folk-tales in order to render them philosophically respectable and morally justifiable. Celsus hints that one of the earliest Greek writers, Pherecydes of Syros (fl. c. 550 B.C.), had already begun to understand the words of Zeus to Hera in a sense other than literal.

Woollcombe suggests that the earliest allegorizing impulse was a desire to escape from the literal meaning of the text, but to preserve the esteem in which the literary work was held by proving that it somehow was really saying something better than it appeared to be saying.

Typology, which appears on the surface to be another form of allegorism, rests on radically different foundations. It is the metod used by the first Christians, and developed extensively by the early Church Fathers, to demonstrate the way in which the New Covenant, disclosed in the New Testament, was a fulfillment of the Old Covenant of Hebrew scripture. Like allegorism, typology recognizes both a literal sense and an undersense; but unlike allegorism, it insists that both are equally true and necessary. In Woollcombe's words:

> Typological exegesis is the search for linkages between events, persons or things within the historical framework of revelation, wheras allegorism is the search for a secondary and hidden meaning underlying the primary and obvious meaning of a narrative. This secondary sense of a narrative, discovered by allegorism, does not necessarily have any connection at all with the historical framework of revelation.[4]

The locus classicus of New Testament typology is the speech of the protomartyr Stephen before the council which accused him of blasphemy against the Law (Acts vii). It is simply a summary of Old Testament teaching on the relations between God and Israel from Abraham to Solomon. Stephen's point is that to believe in these things and to believe in Christ are necessarily one and the same thing: the life and acts of Christ are both the consummation and the recapitulation of the factual history of the Jews. The undersense is there because the Author, God, has put it there; it is not merely a product of human ingenuity.

The allegorism of St. Paul is almost a special case of typology, rather than another version of Hellenistic allegorism as exemplified by Philo of Alexandria (Philo Judaeus) around 50 A.D. The chief example is Galatians iv. 22-31 (KJV):

> For it is written, that Abraham had two sons, the one by a bondmaid, the other by a freewoman.
>
> But he who was of the bondwoman was born after the flesh; but he of the freewoman was by promise.
>
> Which things are an allegory: for these are the two covenants; the one from the mount Sinai, which gendereth to bondage, which is Agar.
>
> For this Agar is mount Sinai in Arabia, and answereth to Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children.
>
> But Jerusalem which is above is free, which is the mother of us all.
>
> For it is written, Rejoice, thou barren that bearest not; break forth and cry, thou that travailest not: for the desolate hath many more children than she which hath an husband.
>
> Now we, brethren, as Isaac was, are the children of promise.
>
> But as then he that was born after the flesh persecuted him that was born after the Spirit, even so it is now.
>
> Nevertheless what saith the scripture? Cast out the bondwoman and her son: for the son of the bondwoman shall not be heir with the son of the freewoman.
>
> So then, brethren, we are not children of the bondwoman, but of the free.

Wollcombe's comparison of this exegeis with that of Philo on the same passage is instructive:

> In Gal. 4, Hagar is said to represent the Old Covenant given on Mount Sinai, and Sarah the New Covenant with the children of promise; the way in which God dealt with Abraham's two wives is used as an allegory of the way in which he deals with Christians and with those Jews who do not accept the New Covenant. Philo, on the other hand, wrote that, 'Sarah, virtue, bears the same relation to Hagar, education, as the mistress to the servant-maid, or the lawful wife to the concubine, and so naturally the mind which aspires to study and to gain knowledge, the mind we call Abraham, will have Sarah, virtue, for his wife, and Hagar, the whole range of school culture, for his concubine.' In the Pauline interpretation, the historical pattern of the story of Sarah and Hagar is used as a parable of

the historical pattern of the story plays no part at all: Philo used only the names of Sarah and Hagar, interpreted allegorically, as a key wherewith to open the door to his own notion of the undersense of the narrative. And the undersense which he discovered has no connexion with God's self-revelation in history, but is merely an aspect of Hellenistic education for which Philo wished to find sanction in Holy Writ.[5]

Unfortunately, the extravagant method of Philonic allegorism was far more influential on the early Fathers than the firmly historical Pauline method, which did not become prominent until the mid-fourth century, with the school of Antioch.[6] The concept of allegorism which passed into Christian popular tradition was one in which there was always implicit a certain disregard for the literal meaning--a concept brilliantly summed up in Harington's metaphor of the rind and the pith, quoted below.

The Middle Ages would appear to have had a clear-cut conception of allegorization, one which in effect put it in its place, summarized in the famous distich which goes back at least to the twelfth century; and possibly to Carolingian times:

> Littera gesta docet, quid credas allegoria,
> Maralis quid agas, quo tendas anagogia.[7]

The literal level tells what happened; the allegorical, what is to be believed; the moral, how to behave; and the anagogical, whither we are tending (the mystical meaning). In actual practice, however, it was difficult to maintain the distinction between allegoria and moralis, especially when it came, as it did with increasing frequency, to an attempt to find an undersense in secular literature. The motivations for this were exactly the same as those of the early pagan allegorists of Homer: a desire to save classical literature for Christian readers by glossing over improprieties and harmonizein it with Christian doctrine and morality. Thus we have the vast fourteenth-century Ovid Moralise, with its attempt to make the nymph Daphne (of the Apollo-and-the-laurel legend) into the Blessed Virgin Mary; Christine de Pisan's Othea; that incredible combination of high thinking and low living, the Gesta Romanorum; and even the allegorization of natural history in the bestiaries.[8] One of the most successful and lasting allegorizations, mainly because it rests on nearly typological resemblances, is the interpretation of Hercules as a pagan type of Samson.

The application of allegorism to secular literature has a curious history. The classic example of medieval imposed allegorism is Jean Molinet's "moralization" of the Roman de la Rose, composed ca. 1482. He takes a work which actually was an allegory of the psychology of a love affair and turns it into an exposition of Christian doctrine, in which the literal sense disappears entirely from the scene. In the Renaissance, Ariosto's Orlando Furioso underwent a similar fate at the hands of its "defenders," who were concerned at the quite justified charges of amorality leveled against it. Its English translator, Sir John Harington, gives in his preface the ultimate rationale of allegorism:

> The ancient Poets haue indeed wrapped as it were in their writings diuers and sundry meanings, which they call the senses or mysteries thereof. First of all for the literall sence (as it were the vtmost barke or ryne) they set downe in manner of an historie the acts and notable exploits of some persons worthy memorie: then in the same fiction, as a second rine and somewhat more fine, as it were nearer to the pith and marrow, they place the Morall sence profitable for the active life of man, approuing vertuous actions and condemning the contrarie. Manie times also vnder the selfesame words they comprehend some true vnderstanding of naturall Philosophie, or sometimes of politike gouernement, and now and then of diuinitie: and these same sences that comprehend so excellent knowledge we call the Allegorie, which Plutarch defineth to be one thing is told, and by that another in vnderstood....
>
> Perseus sonne of Iupiter is fained by the Poets to haue slaine Gorgon, and, after that conquest atchieued, to haue flown vp to heauen. The Historicall sence is this, Perseus the sonne of Iupiter, by the participation of Iupiters vertues which were in him, or rather comming of the stock of one of the kings of Creet, or Athens so called, slew Gorgon, a tryant (sic) in that countrey (Gorgon in Greeke signifieth earth), and was for his vertuous parts exalted by men vp vnto heauen. Morally it signifieth this much: Perseus a wise man, sonne of Iupiter, endewed with vertue from aboue, slayeth sinne and vice, a think base & and earthly signified by Gorgon, and so mounteth vp to the skie of vertue. It signifies in one kind of Allegorie thus much: the mind of man being gotten by God, and so the childe of God killing and vanquishing the earthlinesse of this Gorgonicall nature, ascendeth vp to the vnderstanding of heauenly things, of high things, of eternal things, in which contemplacion consisteth the perfection of man: this is the natural allegory, because man (is) one of the chiefe works of nature. It hath also a more high and heauenly Allegorie, that the heauenly nature, daughter of Iupiter, procuring with her continuall motion corruption and mortality in the inferiour bodies, seuered it selfe at last from these earthly bodies, and flew vp on high, and there remaineth for euer. It hath also another Theological Allegorie: that the angelicall nature, daughter of the most high God the creator of all things, killing & ouercomming all bodily substance, signified by Gorgon, ascended into heauen. The like infinite Allegories I could pike out of other Poeticall fictions....[9]

It is incredible that a commentator with any allegiance whatsoever to the literal meaning of the text could refer to it as a rind--that which is cast away in order to get at the pith--or that any intelligent man could read into the rescuer and husband of Andromeda "the angelicall nature, daughter of the most high God..., killing & ouercomming all bodily substance." This is indeed W.H. Auden's "false and boring allegory," and deservedly contemptible except as sheer ingenuity. Let us now see how allegory and a mode of writing differs from allegorism as a mode of reading.

Allegory and Metaphor

The use of "allegory" as a term denoting a mode of writing, the sense in which it is used by C.S. Lewis, is even older than its use as the name of an interpretative method:

> It should be borne in mind that the word allegoria was not extensively used until the Hellenistic period. Earlier writers used periphrases in which uponoia played the greatest part. When allegoria did come into common use, it first refered to allegory as a mode of expression, i.e., it meant figurative language. Later on, it was used to denote allegory as a method of exegesis, i.e., it meant allegorical interpretation. But the latter usage is not found in pagan literature before Plutarch....[10]

In the famous Letter to Raleigh expounding his intentions in the Faerie Queene, Spenser describes his poem as being "a continued Allegory, or darke conceit." "conceit" at this time meant hardly more than image or metaphor, although the term was generally used to describe a particularly ingenious one. The fact that the conceit is called "dark"-a stock epithet- does not have any heavy mystical implications; if it is not just a paraphrase for "figurative," it probably refers to the fact that Spenser does not explicate his own allegory within the poem but relies on his reader to grasp his very obvious symbolism. He does not tell us that Una's "parents" are Adam and Eve; but, since he has described them as king and queen of a realm called Eden, he scarcely needs to.

Allegory in this sense is more like typology than it is like allegorism; both rest on the presupposition that the true meaning resides in the historical or literal level as well as in the undersense. St. Paul can speak of Christ as the "last Adam" because the Author of history designed the universe in such a way that there would be significant resemblances in what Adam and Christ actually did and suffered. Spenser talks about the espousal of Divine Truth by Holiness in terms of an actual, physically consummated marriage between a knight and a lady. The principle is that there are genuine resemblances between things which can be exploited. When Burns talks about his love being like a red rose, he relies on the fact that the rose possesses qualities, such as sweetness and beauty, which are equally possessed by the girl.

C.S. Lewis distinguishes between allegory, so called, and symbolism, which is in effect the allegorism treated above.[11] His use of the term is quite legitimate in context, since the allegorizing approach to images is characteristic of the symboliste school of poetry originating with Baudelaire and his followers in the nineteenth century and still a dominant force in modern poetry when Lewis wrote. But the term is an awkward one, because symbolism is used in a variety of senses today. When Mr. Duriez compares it favorably to allegory in the article previously cited, the terms of his praise make it obvious that he does not have this definition in mind. I myself am aware of using the word in at least three senses. One is this allegoristic one, in which the undersense dissolves away the literal meaning, like some sort of corrosive acid eating through its container, and stands alone: a character "is" Christ. This, incidentally, never happens in Spenser; his characters remain human, in varying degrees, and can never be totally equated with the virtues they represent. The Redcrosse Knight is not Holiness, but a heroic Everyman in quest of that virtue. A second sense of symbolism is in effect allegory in the expressive sense: the rose both is itself and stands for something else. I should like to call this form natural symbolism, a term which expresses both the fact that such symbols are usually taken from nature, rather than contrived (if contrived, they are usually allegoristic, like the equation of Hagar with education), and my contention that the relation between symbol and thing symbolized a natural one, perceptible by the senses as well as the intellect. I believe that Mr. Duriez is using the term in this sense. A third form of symbolism lies somewhere between the two, as Pauline allegorism lies between Philonic allegorism and typology proper. The symbol in this case, which I shall call allusive symbolism, invokes a frame of reference for the literal level without making it constantly applicable or translating the literal meaning of the work into a consistent undersense. An example would be John Crowe Ransom's poem, "Puncture,"[12] in which a young soldier discovers that his old comrade has been wounded (italics mine):

> "They got you? I have only lost a hat,
> I would have sold the affair for three thin dimes,
> But they have stuck your side. It must be looked at
> And mended." "No, it's an old puncture," said Grimes,
> "Which takes to bleeding sometimes."
>
> "Why, Grimes, I never knew your mortal blood
> Had wasted for my sake in scarlet streams,
> And no word said. A curse on my manhood
> If I knew anything!"

From this extract alone, it would seem that "Puncture" is pure allegorism, and Grimes is a classic Christ figure. But, in the context of the whole poem, it is clear that this equation is not intended. Ransom is invoking the image of the Atonement as a context for human suffering and heroism and for the dependence of the young soldier upon Grimes. The symbol is thus a kind of allusion.

It should be clear at this point that when people like Mr. Duriez express a preference for "symbolism" over "allegory," they are actually preferring what I call allegory to what I call allegorism, Auden's "false and boring allegory" and Rosemond Tuve's "imposed allegory." I should now like to return to Spenser's definition to show how allegory, metaphor, and conceit are related.

When Spenser used the word, it is clear that he thought of all three as qualitatively the same, the exploitation of natural symbolism. The differences are basically quantitative. Spenser calls his poem "a continued Allegory," meaning that he saw it as differing from simple metaphor primarily in its extension, in the number and variety of resemblances worked out. When the Shulamite in Canticles speaks of herself as a "rose of Sharon," the image works like Burns's simile: a limited but not explicit complex of resemblances is called up. We can think of the girl and the rose as being alike in beauty or sweetness or both. Other qualities of the rose, its color and its short life span, are not evoked by the Hebrew poet and are touched on so lightly by Burns that they do not enter into the relevant metaphor. The conceit, a term which became popular as a name for the kind of image used by Petrarch, was an elaboration of an analogy, particularly an ingenious one. Here is a translation of a Petrarchan sonnet by Sir Thomas Wyatt (1503-42):[13]

> My galley charged with forgetfulness
> Through sharp seas in winter nights doth pass
> Tween rock and rock, and eke mine enemy alas,
> That is my lord, steereth with cruelness.
> And every oar a thought in readiness,
> As though that death were light in such a case,
> An endless wind doth tear the sail apace
> Of forced sighs and trusty fearfulness.
> A rain of tears, a cloud of dark disdain,
> Hath done the wearied cords great hinderaunce:
> Wreathed with error and eke with ignoraunce:
> The stars be hid that led me to this pain.
> Drowned is reason that should me comfort,
> And I remain despairing of the port.

When this poem was printed in Tottel's Miscellany (1557), it was given the title, "The Lover Compareth His State to a Ship in Perilous Storm Tossed on the Sea." This is a clear and simple explanation of just what is going on in the conceit (except that it is perhaps inaccurate in assuming that a lover maybe speaking: lines 3-4 suggest that the theme is estrangement from a noble friend and patron). The title alone states the metaphor: it becomes a conceit, a mini-allegory, when Wyatt makes his lord's (or love's) forgetfulness of him a cargo; his enemy (or love), the pilot; his troubles, oars; his sighs, gusts of wind; his tears; rain; his port, happiness; etc. The conceit is essentially like metaphor in that it insists on finding real ways in which estrangement in love or friendship is like the condition of a storm-tossed ship; it differs in that it is interested in exploiting the comparison in as many ways as possible. The full-scale allegory of a narrative like the Faerie Queene again involves a quantitative, not a qualitative, extension.

An allegory, as the term is applied to a work like The Faerie Queene or The Pilgrim's Progress, stands in the same relation to a conceit as a conceit does to a simple metaphor. Indeed, the terms may be used interchangeably to describe a short poem like the Wyatt sonnet: Spenser called his poem "a continued Allegory, or darke conceit." But a long poem like The Faerie Queene would not be called a conceit according to normal Renaissance usage. The allegory is basically an extended elaboration of bothe stasis and process. By extension of stasis I mean an elaboration of details leading to the discovery of multiple correspondences: the poet takes a static relation or equation--lady:rose or unhappy lover:storm-tossed ship--and works it out in as many ways as possible. By extension of process, I mean that the allegory can also elaborate a movement of events, a process in time. The chief and obvious example is the quest, which is at one and the same time a physical journey (the literal level) and a spiritual one. Spenser's knights, who set out on journeys, meet helpful hermits and hostile dragons, find out how to accomplish their quests, and finally achieve victories, are at the same time spiritual "knight-errants who seek, learn the nature of, fail to encompass, meet opposites of, finally achieve or do the work of, some virtue."[14] Either of these processes of extension may be called either allegory or conceit; it is the combination of the two in one work that creates the more complex figure which we usually call allegory.

It is impossible, in the scope of a short article, to elucidate a full-length allegory. I would like to give instead a short poem, on of the most exquisite lyrics of the seventeenth century, which is actually an allegory in form, though the fact is seldom noticed. It is the famous "Song"[15] by Edmund Waller (1606-87):

> Go lovely Rose,
> Tell her that wastes her time and me,
> That now she knows,
> When I resemble her to thee,
> How sweet and fair she seems to be.
> Tell her that's young,
> and shuns to have her Graces spy'd
> That hadst thou sprung
> In Desarts, where no men abide,
> Thou must have uncommended dy'd.
>
> Small is the worth
> Of beauty from the light retir'd;
> Bid her come forth,
> Suffer her self to be desir'd,
> And not blush so to be admir'd.
>
> Then die, that she,
> The common fate of all things rare,
> May read in thee;
> How small a part of time they share,
> That are so wondrous sweet and fair.

Comment, after this, seems an impertinence, but I will endeavor nevertheless. The first stanza is pure conceit, and the explicit meaning is given in the last line. The next two stanzas make an analogy between the rose, whose sweetness is wasted if no one sees or scents it, and the maiden, whose graces are vain if they are not beheld by other people. this is difficult to classify as either extension of stasis or extension of process, but it is closer to the latter in that it deals with the qualities of the rose and the lady in relation to its environment rather than as contained within themselves. The last stanza is purely process, as the process of blooming and fading which the rose goes through is likened to the brief flourishing of youth and beauty, the most transient of human attributes. The structural allegory of this poem is a microcosm of the full-scale allegory of a Dante, a Spenser, or a Bunyan.

Modern Attitudes towards Allegory

Having shown (I hope) that allegory as a mode of expression is a perfectly legitimate form, I would like to consider some of the reasons why it has fallen almost completely into disfavor.

The first and most apparent reason is a transference to it of a totally justifiable dislike of allegorism. The triviality or irrelevance of the interpretative method, which generally manifests itself as a refusal to come to grips with the actual work of literature itself, is as objectionable as any other form of wrong-headedness. And the transference of this attitude is aided by the fact that there are so very few great allegories: except for the medieval Roman de la Rose, Dante, Spenser, and Bunyan, I can think of no really successful large-scale allegorist until C.S. Lewis. And it is worth noting that all of these works have been immensely popular: the Roman throughout the later Middle Ages, Dante and Spenser with poets and men of imagination ever since their publication, if not always with the general public, and Bunyan with almost everyone from his contemporary public to the March sisters in Little Women. Allegory is an extremely rigorous and demanding form; it is an art rather like juggling and making a scale model at one and the same time. It is much easier to do it badly than to do it well, and even easier not to do it at all and to say what you have to say in some other form. For very similar reasons, there are very few great English lyrics written in the more difficult verse forms, like the rondel and the villanelle, and there are far more bad sonnets than good ones.

In addition to the confusion of allegory with allegorism and the scarcity of good allegories, something must be said about the preference for symbolism over allegory implicit in much of modern literary thinking. I believe that this is often something other than the justifiable rejection of allegorism, and approval of what I earlier called natural symbolism, that I think Colin Duriez is expressing. The very rigor of thought and expression demanded by allegory are out of fashion in our age. We like our art abstract, our politics rhetorical, and our philosophy mystical and sensory, if not actually hallucinatory. Allegory, demanding the perception and explication of real and precise analogies, and the rejection of false ones, is an art in which the senses are disciplined by reason. The modern artist often does not care to work this way, and the modern critic even more often resents being asked to read this way. As Northrop Frye has said:

> We have actual allegory when a poet explicity indicates the relationship of his images to examples and precepts, and so tries to indicate how a commentary on him should proceed....
>
> The commenting critic is often prejudiced against allegory without knowing the real reason, which is that continuous allegory prescribes the direction of his commentary, and so restricts its freedom. Hence he often urges us to read Spenser and Bunyan, for example, for the story alone and let the allegory go, meaning by that that he regards his own type of commentary as more interesting. Or else he will frame a definition of allegory that will exclude the poems he likes.[16]

A Final Word

I should now like to re-examine my comments from MYTHLORE I in the light of the definitions and distinctions established in this article. There I distinguished between the work of Tolkien, Lewis, and Williams in terms of myth, allegory, and symbol respectively. The question of myth is worth an article in itself, and I shall set it aside here in order to consider how the three use various types of symbolism, allegory,

and allegorism.

If the fundamental nature of metaphor and allegory is the perception of resemblances between two unlike things, then Tolkien cannot be said to be an allegorist. The people, objects, and events of his world exist in and for themselves. Resemblances are there, but they are not necessary: Frodo may in some ways resemble Christ, but the similarities are inherent in a certain conception of heroism which applies to both, not in a necessity for Frodo to imitate Christ as a type imitates an archetype. Tolkien does use certain powerful natural symbols like kingship, the quest, and the broken sword, but he does not use them allusively. Aragorn's sword which is reforged has certain things in common with Siegfried's, but it is not meant to suggest Siegfried's. In literature, things equal to the same thing are not necessarily equal to each other.

Tolkien also uses natural symbolism in another way which is like that of the allegorist but is based on magic rather than metaphor. An example is Frodo's wounds, which pain him annually on the anniversaries of the occasions when they were inflicted. This is magical rather than natural: ordinary wounds either hurt constantly or when aggravated physically, as by exertion or damp weather. In this case, the actual physically experienced pain is used as a kind of natural symbol of the fact that Frodo has been permanently scared spiritually by his experiences: he cannot relapse naturally into the world of everyday experience that the Shire typifies, in the way that Sam, Merry, and Pippin can. It would be equally wrong to read Frodo's recurring pain as simple descriptive detail or as the stigmata of Christ. The undersense is there, but it does not erode the literal sense.

Charles Williams, as usual, is a special case. His method is unabashed allegorism (which partially explains his much narrower popularity), but an allegorism which is either mystically validated or else demonic. C.S. Lewis (loc. cit.) used the terms "sacramentalism" and "symbolism" interchangeably for what I call allegorism, and the sacramental aspect is very much to the fore in Williams. When the literal story level, and sometimes in fact the world of experience, are dissolved away, what appears in their place is something even more real, something which includes and transcends the literal, as if it were sown a natural body and raised a spiritual body. This process is naturally dependent on an acceptance of his Christian or metaphysical frame of reference, but so is typology dependent on an acceptance of Revelation. And it does not happen capriciously: only certain mystically charged objects or occasions have this solvent power. Examples would be the archetypical Tarot deck resolving the world to the four elements in The Greater Trumps, the Acts of the City in All Hallows Eve, the operations of the Stone of Solomon in Many Dimensions, and the conjuration with the Graal and the Eucharist celebrated by Prester John in War in Heaven. When these events are sacramental, they are unique in history. Once they have taken place, the veil is drawn again and the world of ordinary reality regains its primacy. When they are demonic, they represent a danger, and the thrust of the story is the incarnation of the archetypes in The Place of the Lion, where Anthony, in sacramental allegorism, becomes the Adam in order to prevent the real world from becoming truly sacramental and losing its proper reality. Williams's novels represent a daring and, I think, usually successful attempt to exploit allegorism as a valid mode of expression.

As I said in the previous article, C.S. Lewis's method is that of the allegorist, now to be understood in terms of this discussion. He has certainly the greatest allegorical imagination since Bunyan. His allegories fully fit my definitions, in that they analogize both static relationships and processes of events. In so doing he employs natural symbolism in two different ways. One is to exploit, in a semi-allusive fashion, already established symbols in new ways. Aslan the Lion is an appropriate symbol for Christ because the lion has the traditional symbolic import of royalty: he is the King of Beasts. The lion is in fact an ancient Christ symbol, but such an unfamiliar one that Lewis cannot exploit it allusively: he wrote for children, not art historians. Another example is his use of the Stone Table as a symbol for the Cross: this works instantly because it is the representation of a very obvious and ancient pagan symbol of sacrifice, the altar on which the victims were slain. His other method corresponds to mythopoeia proper: he creates new contexts in which otherwise nonexistent or inappropriate symbols become truly allegorical. The best instance of this is the way in which the prohibition against staying overnight on the Fixed Land in Perelandra is developed as an allegory of the prohibition of the Tree of Knowledge in Genesis and Paradise Lost. It is worked out in such a way as to contain the two elements of the Edenic prohibition that were most crucial for Lewis: the fact that the thing itself was not intrinsically evil, but rather the gift of an occasion for obedience in order that man might have at least one opportunity to give God the gift of obedience, since in all other cases obedience to God coincided with man's selfinterst; and the Miltonic thesis that possession of the prohibited thing was possession of the imperfect form. If Tinidril had chosen to spend a night on the Fixed Land, she would have forfeited her destiny of dwelling permanently on the Hill of Life, Tai Harendrimar. By eating the fruit of knowledge and gaining the experiential knowledge of good and evil, Eve lost the chance to know them intuitively, without having to suffer evil.

Lewis's purpose in doing this is partly artistic: it is the allegorist's proper delight in perceiving or devising, and exploiting, true resemblances. Lewis conceived the world of Perelandra, and fell in love with it, before he imagined what would happen there.[17] There is another purpose, which I think is fundamental to allegory as a mode of expression, in that it defines just what it is that allegory can best express. The essence of metaphor is that it evokes for the tenor or undersense the sensory responses proper to the vehicle or literal level. Our reactions to a lovely girl are proven on the pulses when we are made to perceive them in terms of the freshness and sweetness of a rose. A psychological or moral allegory tries to make us actualy see "Virtue in her shape how lovely,"[18] as the Lady in Comus actually saw Faith, Hope, and Chastity. Lewis's purpose is to evoke such sensory reactions to Christian truths, which in our time suffer the double handicap of being abstract and being trapped in a fixed system of myth and metaphor that are in many ways out of tune with the modern age (or vice versa), so that they tend to be rejected for superficial rather than essential reasons. By framing these truths in a new system, with freshly minted natural symbols, Lewis is able to get in under the guard of the secularly prejudiced reader and awaken first his senses, then his imagination, and ultimately his reason and will, so that he becomes convinced of the truths he had refused to look at before but can now see clearly and distinctly from the new angle provided by the new allegory.

Footnotes

1. Karl Beckson and Arthur Ganz, A Reader's Guide to Literary Terms (N.Y., 1960), p. 6.
2. A Glossary of Literay Terms (N.Y., 1957), p. 2.
3. "The Biblical Origin and Patristic Development of Typology," in G.W.H. Lampe and K.J. Woollcombe, Essays on Typology (London, 1957), p. 50.
4. Ibid., p. 40. Italics in the original.
5. Ibid., p. 53. Italics in the original.
6. Ibid., p. 56.
7. Quoted in Rosemond Tuve, Allegorical Imagery (Princeton, 1966), p. 45.
8. Ibid., passim.
9. A Preface, or Rather a Briefe Apologie of Poetrie, and of the Author, from Ariosto (1591), in O.B. Hardison, Jr., English Literary Chriticism: The Renaissance (N.Y., 1963), pp. 210-211.
10. Woollcombe, p. 50, n. 1. Italics in the original; I have transliterated the Greek words.
11. The Allegory of Love (N.Y., 1936), pp. 44-48.
12. In Poems and Essays (N.Y., 1955), pp. 57-58.
13. In Silver Poets of the Sixteenth Century, ed. Gerald Bullett (London and N.Y., 1947), p. 4.
14. Tuve, p. 90n.
15. In Seventeenth-Century Verse and Prose, Vol. I, ed. Helen C. White, Ruth C. Wallerstein, and Ricardo Quintana (N.Y, 1951), p. 352.
16. Northrop Frye, Anatomy of Criticism (Princeton, 1957), p. 90
17. C.S. Lewis et al., "Unreal Estates," in Of Other Worlds, ed. Walter Hooper (London, 1966), p. 87.
18. John Milton, Paradise Lost, Iv, 848.

THE LANGUAGE OF J.R.R. TOLKIEN in The Lord of the Rings

by Judy Winn Bell

J. R. R. Tolkien, best known as author of The Lord of the Rings, was also a linguist, specializing in Anglo-Saxon. Because of his technical background in language study, it is interesting to examine his use of language in creating The Lord of the Rings to see how Tolkien as language technician interacts with Tolkien as literary artist. This paper will discuss: 1) his attitudes toward his characters; 2) his own use of language -- or his style -- in telling his story and building his world of Middle-Earth; and 3) the styles of prose and poetry -- and the separate languages -- of the characters and groups of characters who inhabit the complex world he has created.

Tolkien's concern with -- and love of -- language manifests itself in many ways in The Lord of the Rings. Throughout the story, there is an implication that there is a kind of magic, a power in the words themselves, and that they are not to be taken lightly. The wizard Gandalf's recitation of the ring inscription in Black Speech at the Council of Elrond is cause for much consternation:

> The change in the wizard's voice was astounding. Suddenly it became menacing, powerful, harsh as stone. A shadow seemed to pass over the high sun, and the porch for a moment grew dark. All trembled, and the Elves stopped their ears.